Testimony
To
Committee on Planning and Development
Raised Bill No. 5799
Bristol Community Organization, Inc.
55 South Street
Bristol, CT 06010
Thomas H. Morrow, Executive Director

March 7, 2008

Thank you to the Committee for this opportunity to testify regarding "An Act Concerning Municipal Oversight of Community Action Agencies". While the legislation is well intended, the results would further complicate the operation of the twelve federally designated Community Action Agencies located in Connecticut. It will result in detrimental unintended consequences.

Since their inception during the Lyndon Johnson War on Poverty, these agencies have assisted low income individuals and families. For over forty years, Connecticut's neediest residents have earned diplomas, learned job skills, found permanent housing and improved their lives.

During that time, the Boards of Directors ranged in size from not more than fifty-one and not less than fifteen members. The bill creates a technical problem because there are 169 towns and twelve agencies. Each community action agency has a designated catchments area. Smaller agencies like Bristol Community Organization, which serves five communities, already have members from each community on the Board. But for agencies in eastern Connecticut or for larger agencies, boards could be as larger than the law would propose to allow (25 members) in order to meet the individual town requirement. Changing the number of people who could serve on the board will be a costly, cumbersome mandate.

In the 32 years of Bristol Community Organization's operation, no chief elected official has ever attended regular meetings of the Board of Directors. The public officials always send their designees. To mandate the chief elected official of each municipality in the communities served by a community action agency would be difficult to achieve. As the attached map indicates, The Community Renewal Team (located in Hartford) serves over 60 communities. The mandate to require the Director of Social Services programs in each municipality in the communities served by a community action agency would also be difficult to achieve.

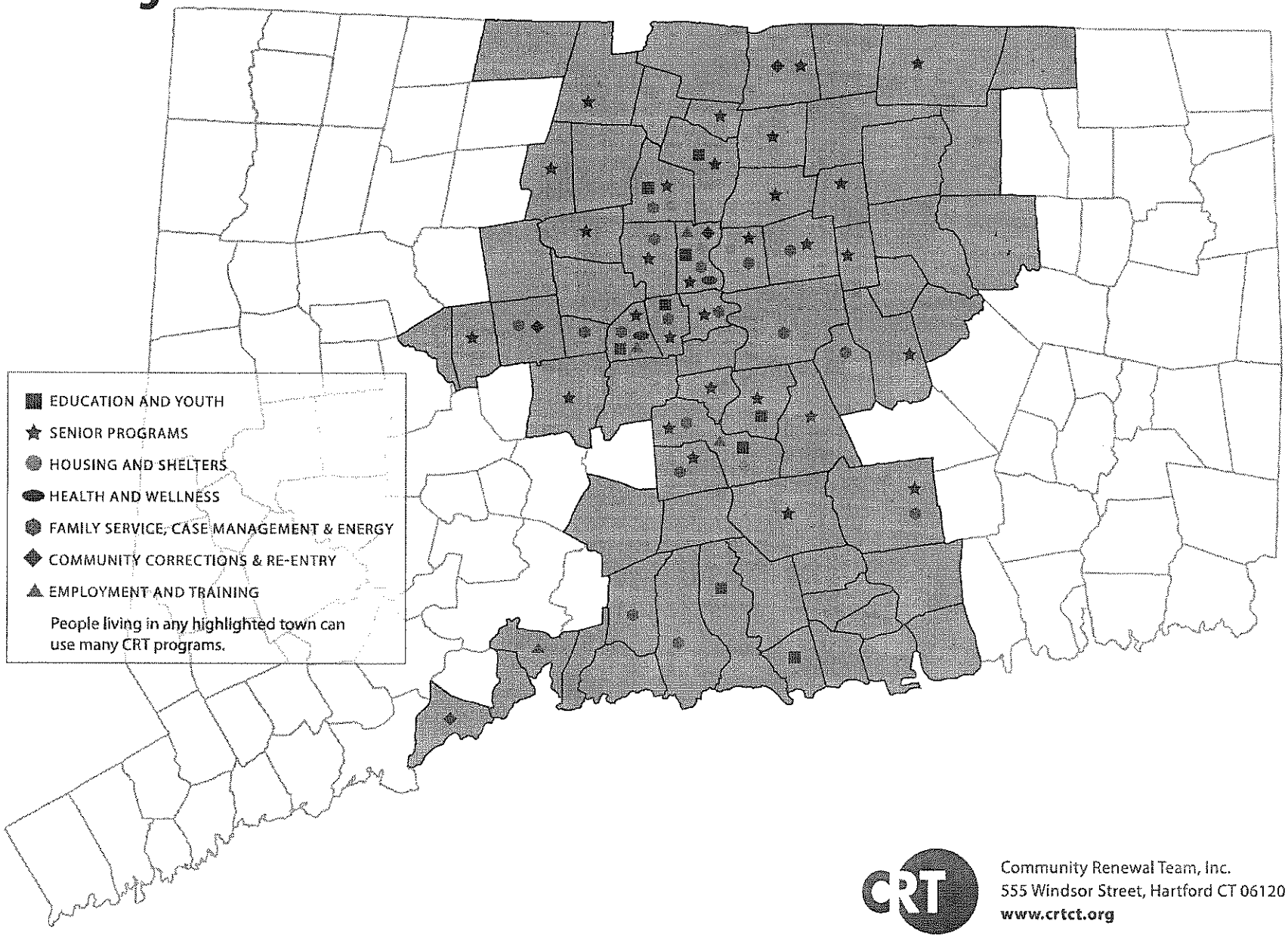
The duties of the boards and the adoption of bylaws for standards of accepting contracts are specified in each agency's governing documents already. Because each agency receives money from the Connecticut Department of Social Services through contracts which are reviewed by the Attorney General's office, standards are already in place by mandates from those agencies.

Each community action agency MUST – by contract – send an independent audit to the Department of Social Services each year. Having the State Auditors and the Department of Social Services select auditors who would audit the Department of Social Services contracts could create unintended conflicts of interest.

I respectfully ask that you leave the law as it is.

Community Renewal Team

Serving Our Communities



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